(e) Air traffic has declined sharply during the last two years on account of overall depressed market conditions due to various factors.

Participation of Lufthansa Airlines in airport modernisation

4024. DR. C. NARAYANA REDDY :
SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH :

Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that Lufthansa Airlines has proposed to participate in the modernisation of airports in the metro cities in the countries;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) what is the reaction of Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI SHRIPAD YESSO NAIK) : (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) Not applicable in view of above.

Improvement in ground services of AI

4025. SHRI S. M. LAL JAN BASHA : Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state :

(a) whether any step has been taken to improve ground services of Air India ;

(b) whether it is a fact that response from sales offices of Air India is not very prompt or efficient;

(c) in what way Government will ensure that Air India improves its functioning to make it competitive;

(d) whether any plan has been finalised to change the outlook and work culture of Air India's employees; and

(e) if so, the details thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI SHRIPAD YESSO NAIK) : (a) Yes, Sir. As an ongoing exercise, Air India has provided following facilities to improve its ground services :—

(i) Special Services Unit to facilitate first/executive class passengers, (ii) Tele-check-in facility, (iii) advance seat reservation seat facility; (iv) Kerb side check-in facilities for first/executive class passengers at Mumbai, (v) Maharaja lounge facility, and (vi) Interline through check-in facility.

There is also a plan for a call center to provide 24 hours information to passengers on a toll free number.

(b) There have been some complaints in this regard and corrective action has been taken. Emphasis is being given on courtesy, promptness and efficiency.

(c) Air India has, *inter-alia*, taken following major initiatives to improve its functioning to make it competitive :—(i) Reservation and other information on the internets, (ii) Flat beds/slumberettes and DVDs in the first and executive class of all B-747-400 aircraft, (iii) Frequent Flyer Programme, Maharaja Club, Leading Edge Club programmes, (iv) Food festivals, up gradation of meals.

(d) and (e) Emphasis has been given on the training of the employees particularly the staff at booking offices and airports, by having special customer care programmes conducted by an outside agency, in order to improve the services offered to passengers.

Revision in air and cargo fares

4026. DR. AKHILESH DAS : Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Indian Airlines, Air India and other private air operators like the Jet Airways have lately hiked the air fares and cargo fares;

(b) if so, to what extent indicating the revised and the previous fares; and

(c) the reasons for such a hike ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI SHRIPAD YESSO NAIK) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Indian Airlines, Jet Airways and Air Sahara have increased their Rupee fares for passengers on domestic sectors by 15% *w.e.f.* 26-3-2003. On international sector, Indian Airlines has increased its fares from India to South-East Asia by 7—18%, on select routes, *w.e.f.* 5-4-2003 and Air India has increased its international passenger fares by 5% from India to USA, Canada, Europe, Middle East, South East Asia, Japan, Korea and Australia.

Indian Airlines and Jet Airways have not effected any increase in their cargo tariffs since the beginning of the year 2003, whereas Air Sahara has increased it by 7—10% from January. 2003 onwards. Air India has increased the rates for perishable cargo from Mumbai to the Gulf by Rs. 2/- per KG. for three months and to London from Rs. 65,000/- per container to Rs. 77,000/- per container.

(c) Domestic airlines have effected increase in air fares in order to offset the increase in the cost of Aviation Turbine Fuel and other operating costs. Air India has followed the general fare increase effected by the International Air Transport Association (IATA). The cargo rates of Air India traditionally go up